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Among the Sagebrush

Love of the land and lifestyle drive the Skinner family in the high desert of Oregon | 6

- **I'm A Drover: Greg Henderson | 14**
- **Machinery Pete: Auction Action On Balers and Loader Tractors | 18**
- **Evolution of U.S.—Mexico Cattle and Beef Trade | 28**

FARM JOURNAL

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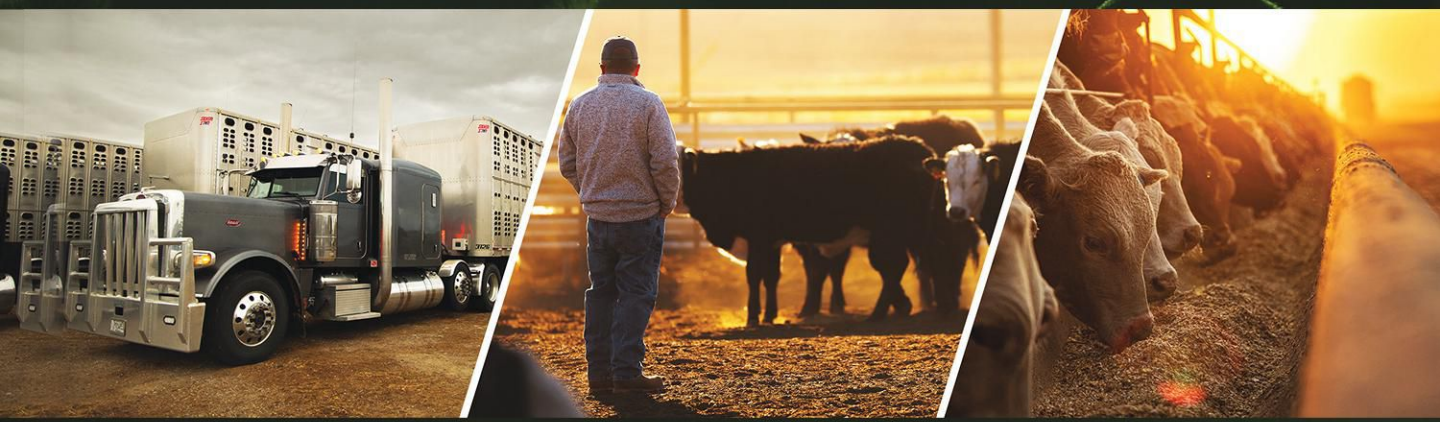

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Driving the Beef Market

PHOTO: USDA

6 Cover Story: Among the Sagebrush
Seven generations of Skinners have focused on efficiency and expansion for success.
COVER PHOTO: MAGGIE MALSON

12 It's Never too Early for Tax Planning?
Make the appointment and come up with a plan.

14 Remembering Greg Henderson
An icon, an advocate and the ultimate drover for the industry.

18 Hot-Ticket Iron
Auction prices for hay equipment and midsize loader tractors are breaking records.

22 Manage the Financial Risks of Conservation
How to build an operation ready for investment.

24 Match Cow Size to Production Goals
The right size depends on your environment and feed resources.

26 When Hay Runs Tight
Explore proactive strategies now to avoid costly decisions later.

30 Beef Checkoff: Doing More With Less
The industry generated $3,847 per checkoff dollar in 2023 versus $1,100 in 1990.

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A Legacy Worth Living

When someone dear to us unexpectedly passes away, it rocks the world as we know it. I was just starting my day at the Missouri State Fair when I got the call on Aug. 16 that Greg Henderson, my colleague and friend, passed away. Just the evening before, right next to where our gilts were penned in the pig barn on the fairgrounds, a fellow show family lost a loved one to a heart attack.

While a patriarch of their family was suddenly gone, they chose to show their pigs. After all, the pig barn at the state fair was his favorite place on earth. Without a doubt, they knew he would want them to be in the show ring. They had livestock to care for and a legacy to live.

GENERATIONAL SUCCESS

As you'll read in the cover story, starting on page 6, the Skinner family knows a thing or two about living and leaving a legacy. Seven generations have ranched in the high desert of southeast Oregon. Their willingness to implement new ideas with each generation is testament to their love for the land and the lifestyle. And the fact they use a plane, drones, dogs, horses and people to check and gather cattle over thousands of acres is fascinating for this Midwest girl who has 200 cows spread over a mere 12-mile radius.

WELCOME MAGGIE

Speaking of ranching in the West, Farm Journal welcomed Maggie Malson to the team in April. The Skinner family story is her first cover story for Drovers.

Maggie has spent two decades as an ag communications professional telling the story of farmers and ranchers through her writing and photography. She'll continue to do the same for Drovers. The first 13 years of her career, she served as the publisher for the Idaho Cattle Association then transitioned to freelance work.

Maggie Malson

Maggie and her husband, Josh, are raising their four children on his family's seedstock Angus and Hereford operation in southwest Idaho. Ranch life keeps them busy, but they also enjoy watching sports and showing cattle and sheep.

Farm Journal is committed to the Drovers brand and serving beef producers and the industry. Despite the tremendous loss of Greg and his leadership, Maggie and I, along with others at Farm Journal, will work every day to live up to his standards. His legacy will live on. Like so many of us who farm and ranch on the same land that birthed a dream generations before, living and leaving a legacy is so very important.

Katie Humphreys

Katie Humphreys,
Farm Journal Content Director

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Among the Sagebrush

Education, efficiency and expansion have been the formula for success for seven generations of Skinners in the high desert of southeast Oregon

BY MAGGIE MALSON

With a commitment to family, a love of ranching and unmatched perseverance, seven generations of the Skinner family have raised cattle in the high desert of Jordan Valley, Ore.

Vast and expansive describe these parts of the West, where some counties are as big as states. For example, Malheur County, where the family's land is located in the southeast part of the state, is bigger than New Hampshire.

The ranch sits at the end of a gravel road, sandwiched between sagebrush pastures with the view of lava rock vistas on the horizon. Hay fields and marshy meadows appear almost out of nowhere proving water is vital to sustaining the community, livestock and wildlife calling this place home.

With each generation, education, efficiency and expansion have played a role.

"Education has always been important to the family," says Bob Skinner Jr., the fifth generation. "My dad had an agriculture degree from Oregon State. I went to the College of Idaho on a basketball and football scholarship and got a degree in business with a minor in accounting. We've encouraged our kids and grandkids to also get an education outside of the ranch before they came back."

When Bob returned to the ranch after college in 1972, he transitioned the bookwork to a computer. Prior to that, Bob Sr. kept meticulous ledgers, but he encouraged his son to try new things, evolve efficiencies and expand where he could.

BIRD'S-EYE VIEW

Bob developed a love for flying and purchased an airplane, which saves time checking water and

PHOTOS: MAGGIE MALSON

Meet the Skinner Family

From an early age, brothers Silas and Mike Skinner knew they wanted to ranch. Both attended Eastern Oregon University, returning in 1998 and 2005, respectively, to join their parents, Bob Jr. and Karen, who still reside on the ranch. Today the brothers manage the day-to-day operations of raising cattle and hay. In addition, Silas's two sons, Kasen and Kort, have joined the ranch full time.

Kasen says when he went to college, he dreamed about coming back to ranch. He returned in 2020. He and his wife, Jayce, are expecting a baby and will be bringing up the eighth generation on the ranch.

"I try to know the cows to the best of my ability," Kasen says. "That's what I love to do. The cowherd is my favorite."

Kort, the newest full-time rancher in the family, enjoyed sports more than ranching as a youth.

"I got a dog when I was 11, so I started helping move cows," he says. "Literally one of the reasons I never wanted to miss moving cows was because I had my dog."

Kort was in high school during the pandemic, so he was able to turn out cows and participate in brandings, which was a major factor in his decision to return to the ranch. He graduated from the University of Idaho with a bachelor's degree in agribusiness in December 2023.

"I'm really interested in the marketing part of the business," he says.

Silas and his wife, Tracy, also have a daughter, Regann, who works in ag lending. Mike and his wife, Kelsi, have a son, Jayden, 15; and a daughter, Ryann, 13.

All family members help during the busy summer hay season and spring brandings.

cattle. The family runs cattle on private and federal Bureau of Land Management land. The public land covers rough terrain with nearly 4,000 miles of pipeline just on their side of Malheur County.

"It would take all day to check the pipelines. I thought there had to be a better way," Bob says. "My son Mike or I fly the pipelines every other day. We want to make sure there are no leaks and the tanks have water."

Cattle can only go 24 hours without water, so frequent checks are a must.

"The cows can drink a tank dry or so low the calves can't get to it, which almost guarantees they get pneumonia. We've avoided a few wrecks because we could see the problem before it was a problem," Bob says. "The plane was an expensive investment, but our accountant says it has made us money."

The plane also helps when gathering cattle off South Mountain.

"When I was gathering cattle growing up, it would take a couple weeks to get them all," Bob explains. "We'd go out when it was hot, which wasn't good, but we could catch them at water. Then we'd have to go back and get another handful at a time. Now, we have four to five guys on horseback, our radios and the plane. We can locate the cows and they can get them all in one sweep."

In addition to the plane, the family uses drones to check cows in the brush.

"It's easier to zoom in and see tag numbers or if there's a problem with a calf when using a drone, rather than flying by in a plane at 120 mph," says Kort Skinner, the seventh generation. "Drones pay for themselves quickly when you find a calf that's cold or a cow calving."

LAND INVESTMENTS

The Skinner family has always been progressive, and they're not afraid to try something new or make changes when current systems aren't working.

Through the years, they have

›

The Skinners are partial to red cows, primarily Red Angus, but the family is starting to incorporate Black Angus as they expand their herd. They say the Red Angus cow is a good mother, and the heat and fly tolerance is a plus.

With thousands of acres to cover, an airplane has been an investment that has saved valuable time. Checking pipelines and cattle takes about an hour versus all day in a vehicle.

cleared brush and rocks and leveled fields to turn wild hay meadows into alfalfa fields. They've installed pivots and pipelines and use a riser system to irrigate fields.

When you have more productive ground, you can have more cows, says Silas, the sixth generation.

In 1993, the family bought a ranch closer to town, which included additional cattle permits on BLM ground. They also drilled a well to irrigate hay ground.

"Drilling the well and fertilizing not only allowed us to produce more, but it also helped improve hay ground," Bob says. "Our pastures come back better. If we can get everything wet a couple times, we get a huge amount of pasture. That helps put weight on calves. We're able to produce all the feed we need here and sell some too."

NEW GENERATION, NEW IDEAS

As each generation has returned, they have brought new ideas.

In the 1950s when Bob Sr. and brother Dan took over shared management of the ranch from their parents, Kirtland and Johanna, they began focusing on increasing cowherd numbers and quality.

When Silas and his wife, Tracy, returned to the ranch, they started evaluating cattle genetics again. The maternal qualities of the Red Angus breed appealed to them and they purchased all red bulls in 2000 to begin phasing out Hereford genetics. Today, their cow herd remains red based, but the family is starting to incorporate Black Angus genetics by buying some of the neighbors' cows to continue to expand.

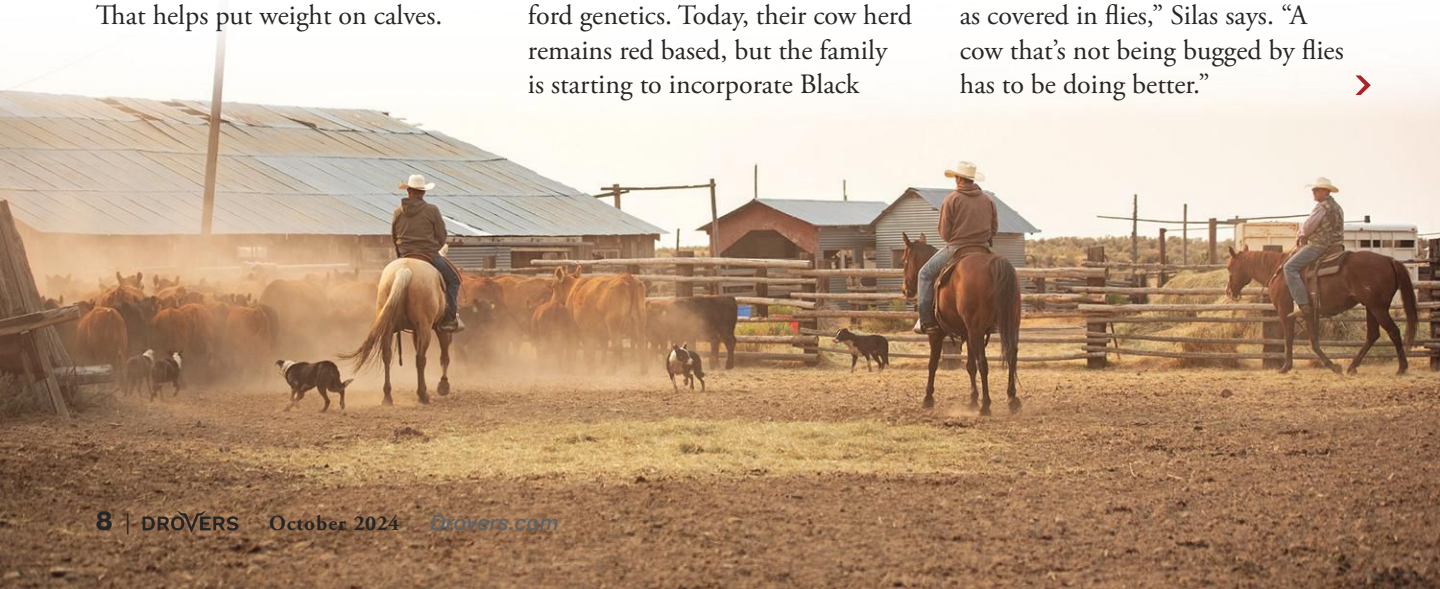
"The Red Angus cow is a very good mother," Silas says. "The Herefords didn't have enough milk, and we had a lot of bottle calves. We also feed out all our cattle, and the Red Angus breed just does the best for us."

Mike, the sixth generation, says he's partial to the red cows too.

"I think they are definitely better mama cows," he adds. "You can get more bang for your buck. We'd have to pay way more for a black bull of the same caliber."

Heat and fly tolerance is also a plus with red cattle.

"You just don't see the red ones as covered in flies," Silas says. "A cow that's not being bugged by flies has to be doing better." ›



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> **It's a good life. We want to make a living and build something we can pass along.**
>
> —*Silas Skinner*

Calving ease has also been a huge factor. The family used to bring 300 heifers into a lot near the house and calve inside a barn. Silas admits it could turn into a mess quickly with 40 to 50 calves dropping a day.

Since 2017, the heifers have calved a few miles from the house out among the sagebrush pastures. The cows also calve on sagebrush, beginning in February with the majority in March.

"Calving out in the rocks where no one can watch them means calving ease is a very big factor for us," Mike explains.

The brush provides protection from the wind and elements and helps eliminate sickness and scours, Silas adds.

The Skinners used artificial insemination for a few years, but it didn't fit their operation, and they didn't see much of an increase in genetics.

"It's hard where we run our heifers to get them through the chute three to four times," Silas says. "Instead, we try to buy the top 30% in our bulls and be on the leading edge of genetics. We have built our cowherd from scratch."

When it comes to technology, the family most recently purchased an ultrasound machine.

"We preg August to the end of September or first of October," says Silas, who has been preg checking since he was 22. "Thanks to the ultrasound machine, we have been able to identify and ship those open cows in August before the market goes down too much. We wean the calves, the trucks came and the cull cows are gone. We save the pasture. The ultrasound machine will probably pay for itself in a year or two."

Fall time also means gathering cattle from pastures and allotments and weaning the calves marketed through Superior Livestock Auction's Video Royale sale in July.

"They get one round of shots while still on the cows, then after a week or so we gather the pairs, sort off the calves and bring them back to the homeplace. The cows are turned back out for another 30 days or so," Silas says.

This change in cattle management has helped with efficiency and animal care.

"We used to haul everything here, sort and wean, then take the cows back out to the brush, but this way, it's less stressful on everyone. We'll keep the calves in a feedlot on hay for about five days. They will get the rest of their shots, then we move them to the meadows to grow on grass."

After about 30 days, the calves are weighed and sorted into groups of heifers and steers and shipped to buyers in November.

MATTERS OF LEGACY

For the Skinner family, cattle ranching is truly a lifestyle.

"You have to love it to want to make a living at it," Bob says.

It is a shared love of the land, the livestock and leaving a legacy that has unified the family since 1863.

Through the decades the Skinners have been diligent when it

An abundance of wildlife, including geese, deer, cranes and pheasants, thrive and coexist on the ranch due to a well-managed irrigation system.

comes to succession planning. Bob bought into the ranch as a partner with his dad and uncle in 1972 after returning from college. In 1979, the family worked with attorneys and changed the structure of the ranch to a family corporation to facilitate transitions.

When Bob Sr. and his wife, Sara, moved to a nursing home in 2009, Silas and Mike bought his shares and their two sisters' shares. In 2020, the brothers purchased shares from their dad to pass on to the next generation.

Silas says keeping the lines of communication open among all family members is important.

"Everybody gets along with everyone," he says. "That's important to us. Mike and I usually talk in the morning about what the day might look like, and I talk to the boys. We all have our jobs and know what to do. Everybody works well together. If there are disagreements, we get through them."

One thing the family has always done is paid everyone who works on the ranch, even the kids.

"We didn't get a lot, but we always got paid," Silas says. "That helped keep us interested in coming back. It's a good life. We want to make a living and build something we can pass along."

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It's Never too Early to Think About Tax Planning?

Make the appointment and come up with a plan

BY BETHANY JOHNSTON AND AARON BERGER

Fall is in the air, which means it's a good time to meet with your tax accountant to discuss upcoming expenses and income. Allowing ample time means you can be more strategic about making major equipment purchases and selling livestock and crops. That level of thought and planning can help you avoid unforeseen tax implications. It's never too early to talk to your accountant.

TIPS WHEN PLANNING A PRE-TAX MEETING:

- **Start early.** Make an appointment with your accountant. Meeting in October should allow time to make end-of-year decisions. Planning in advance is advantageous, as selling cattle takes some coordination and checks can be large.

- **Come prepared.** Get your books up to date. Email your tax accountant any reports for the year. Electronic bookkeeping programs have templates for reports, or you can create a custom report, and share info in Excel or PDF form.

- **Look ahead.** What future expenses do you anticipate? Will any additional income come in before Dec. 31? Did you purchase or trade any equipment? Bring the purchase agreements/trade papers for this year's equipment purchases.

SOUND BUSINESS DECISIONS TO CONSIDER IF YOU MAKE A PROFIT:

- **Estate and transition planning for your operation.** Some of your attorney's fees might qualify as tax-deductible expenses.

- **Maintenance and repairs.** Schedule a time before the end of the year to repair equipment, buildings or pivots; make land improvements, such as fence, tanks or stock wells; or control invasive species.

- **Pay down debt, with a plan.** According to Tina Barrett, executive director of the Nebraska Farm Business Inc.: Excess funds are tricky. To have extra cash to pay down debt, you need taxable income. "But if someone takes $100,000 and pays down a land note, they may get to the end of the year and realize their taxable income is $100,000 higher than usual. It is not a pleasant surprise, when there is no money to pay expenses," she says. Every situation is different, so seek guidance from your accountant.

- **Do not spend money on tax deductible expenses just to reduce tax payments.** "If you didn't spend that $100,000 on stuff that's not needed, and instead you spend $30,000 on taxes and $70,000 to reduce debt, you would be further ahead financially," Barrett says.

Ask your accountant if it will be hard or if it's still a good plan to meet the March 1 deadline to submit taxes. An alternative is to make an estimate by Jan. 15, pay the estimate and then you have until April 15 to file and pay the difference. This can be beneficial with late information, or if income is higher than the previous year.

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Remembering Greg Henderson

I'M A DROVER

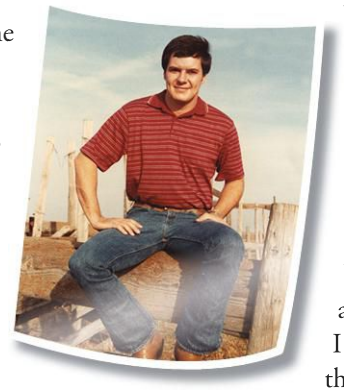
GREG HENDERSON
Editorial Director, Drovers

An icon, an advocate and the ultimate drover for the beef industry

BY JENNIFER SHIKE

Who was Greg Henderson? The list is long. But if I had to tell you in a minute, I'd point out that he's a respected and trusted leader in the beef industry. A devoted husband and proud father. An award-winning writer. A witty, tell-it-to-you-straight cowboy. But most importantly, he was a good friend.

I looked up to Greg and his artful ability to speak the truth. Over the years, he challenged me to stretch myself as a writer. He wasn't afraid to ruffle feathers and modeled how to do it respectfully. He grew my knowledge of the livestock industry and passed down important bits of history. A 'good job' from Greg meant the world to me.



When I found out he unexpectedly passed away on Aug. 16, I joined so many in a state of shock and disbelief. We had just been at Ag Media Summit where we were able to catch up in real life, instead of morning Zoom calls. I listened to him kick off the 25th Ag Media Summit with his heartfelt reflections on how the event came to be when he was serving as chairman of the committee. He also did a fabulous job moderating a panel on animal health and traceability.

As his personal paparazzi, I took lots of pictures and reminded him he would thank me later. I always did that whenever we were at Farm Journal events or Ag Media Summit meetings together. It's my way of letting people know they are important to me — to try to capture the moment with them in some small way.

To know Greg is to know his wife, Ruth, because he could never stop talking about her. He was crazy about her and their kids and grandkids. He proudly brought Ruth to every event he could, and as I sat with them a few weeks back, I couldn't help but admire the connection they shared. Behind every great writer is someone who inspires, listens and encourages them to go for it.

My last texts with Greg included a picture I took of him and Ruth at the 50th anniversary celebration of the Livestock Publications Council (LPC), an organization he devoted great time and energy to over the years, and

a picture of the stack of awards he brought home from the LPC contest at Ag Media Summit. He ended up staying home the morning of the awards ceremony to work on stories for the September issue of Drovers, so I stepped in to accept those awards on his behalf.

It seems quite fitting the State of the Beef Industry Report he was so proud of brought home two first-place awards. He also took home first place for his in-depth reporting on packer capacity. Greg was gifted at understanding the markets and how to effectively communicate the numbers.

Annie McCullough, a national accounts manager for livestock at Farm Journal, describes Greg so well.

Greg's family, wife of 41 years, Ruth; daughter, Lisa, and her husband, Greg Suellentrop; grandkids, Charles and Amelia; and son, Jared, were his top priority.

"Greg defined a drover," she says. "He lived that meaning of a drover in every part of his life."

I'll never forget the conversation where Greg explained the meaning of a drover — a herdsman, a caretaker, a leader of his stock. Greg was the ultimate drover for the beef industry.

The unexpected loss of Greg is a hard reminder to prioritize what and who matters most. We could all do a better job of letting people know how much we care for and appreciate them. I hope Greg knew how much he meant to so many. I will always remember how he engaged with people and made sure they knew they were seen and heard, just like any good drover.

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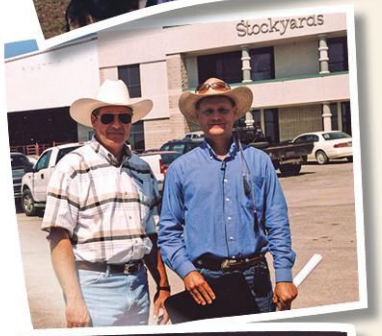

In Memory of Our Friend and Colleague

Here is a collection of thoughts and stories from some of Greg's industry friends about what he meant to them, the beef industry and ag journalism.

"Working with Greg was a highlight of my career. He was never afraid to tackle the tough subjects. My last email to him regarded a column he was working on, and my last sentence to him was, 'Keep writing truth.' He never had an agenda except for truth — even if it meant taking flack. When I think of Greg, I think of qualities like professional, courteous and respectful. He treated everyone that way." *—Nevil Speer, beef industry consultant*

"Greg and I first met and began working together in 1988. Over the years, we became very good friends. Greg was both a great asset and a friend to the beef industry and many of us associated with the industry. He will be sorely missed." *—John Nalivka, Sterling Marketing, Inc.*

"As a colleague and cattle producer, I learned something from Greg every time we spoke or were in a meeting together, which was several times a week. His passion for the beef industry was inspiring — and he sure enjoyed giving me grief for buying turkey at Thanksgiving when I have a freezer full of beef." *—Katie Humphreys, Farm Journal*

"Greg had a significant impact on my life as a coworker and mentor. He was a great ally to the beef community, and his thoughtful editorials and articles helped drive improvements across the industry. His sense of humor made him an excellent storyteller." *—Wyatt Bechtel, Broadhead*

"Greg was one of those guys you truly liked working alongside because he supported everyone around him. I'm going to miss his friendship, his wicked and dry sense of humor and his devotion to the cattle industry." *—John Herath, U.S. Meat Export Federation and former Farm Journal News Director*

"Greg was a stalwart communicator for the U.S. beef industry. The man behind the pen was kind, courageous and curious. He advocated for this great way life and never lost his vision for seeing the bigger picture. Greg stood up for what he believed in and never let corporate interest sway his writing." *—Clint Mefford, Zoetis*

"Greg was a wonderful friend who has more talent than anyone knew. A brilliant man with a gentle soul who would tell the most entertaining stories that you just couldn't make up." *—Diane E. Johnson, Details by Design*

"Greg was a man of few words unless you got him fired up about a certain beef topic or when talking about his family or dogs. How lucky am I to have known someone so special." *—Kathy LaScala, ag media sales and trade shows professional*

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While the market for late-model, used equipment for row-crop operations has softened this year, that's not necessarily the case for hay and forage equipment and midsize loader tractors.

Take round balers for example. At an Aug. 1, 2024, farm auction in Solen, N.D., a 2022 New Holland Roll-Belt 560 Specialty Crop Plus round baler (1,810-bale count) sold for $53,975. That was a new record auction price by a whopping $10,465.

That record price lasted one day.

On Aug. 2, at a farm auction in Hospers, Iowa, a one-owner 2021 New Holland Roll-Belt 560 Specialty Crop Plus (102-bale count) sold for $56,000.

A March 9 consignment auction in Stamford, N.Y., produced the highest auction price ever on a Massey Ferguson round baler. A 4160V model with 698 bales sold for $59,000.

Modern hay rakes aren't your grandfather's hay rakes. A 2014 Claas Liner 4000 49' rake sold for $50,000 at a Feb. 1 farm auction in Mount Vernon, Wash. Eight weeks later during a March 28 online auction in Copeland, Kan., a 2020 Rowse Ultimate V-rake, 27-wheel size went for $49,500.

This 2021 New Holland Roll-Belt 560 Specialty Crop Plus round baler with only one owner and a 102-bale count sold for $56,000.

LOADER TRACTOR RECORDS

Even more pronounced the past 18 months have been the solid auction prices on mid-horsepower loader tractors. The July 27 auction we filmed for our "Machinery Pete" TV show in Paris, Mo., by Wheeler Auctions & Real Estate was the largest auction I've seen in my 35 years. They sold equipment for more than 12 hours.

Somewhere in one of the many long rows of equipment that day was a 2008 John Deere 7430 Premium tractor with 1,354 hours and a John Deere 741 loader that sold for $160,000. That's a new record auction price by $3,550, which was set three years prior.

When it comes to pre-DEF, pre Tier IV tractors, I have many examples of high prices in the 100 hp to 174 hp range. On the red side, a 1990 Case IH 7110 2WD with 2,562 hours sold for $72,000 at an Aug. 22 farm retirement auction in Rock Valley, Iowa, by Zomer Company Realty & Auction. That was $11,000 more than the prior record for that model.

Four days later, at a farm retirement auction in Wayne, Neb., by Creamer Auction Company, a 1995 Case IH 7220 front-wheel assist with 2,844 hours and one owner sold for $79,500. That's

the second-highest price for the past eight and a half years.

A trio of green time machines sold for big bucks when the gavel fell at an April 29 retirement auction for R&M Motors in Berlin, Wis., by Wilkinson Auction & Realty.

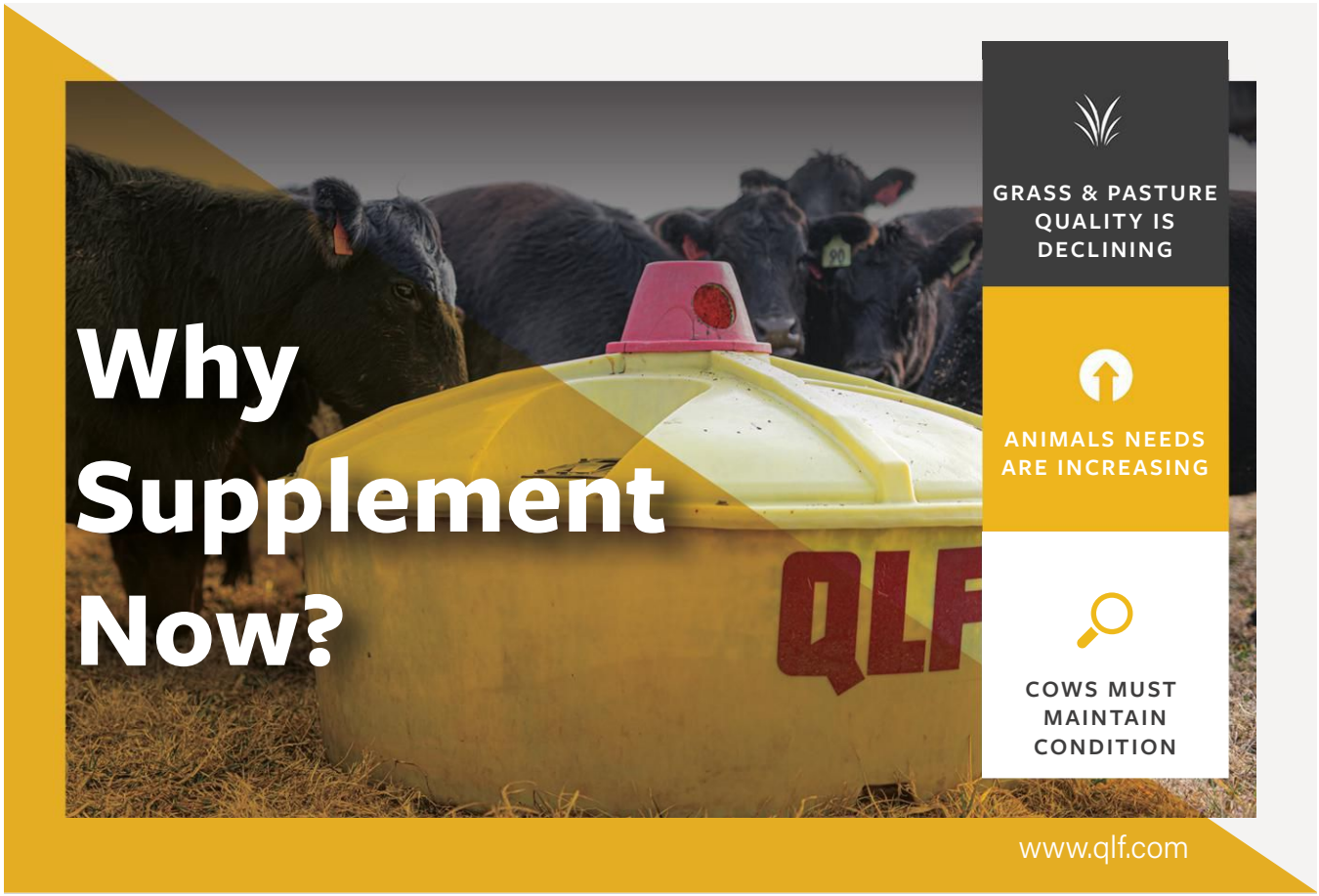
The tractor in the middle of the photo at right is a 1992 John Deere 4055 with 22 actual hours. Prior to that day, a 1989 2WD model with 215 hours that sold at a Dec. 19, 2016, farm auction in St. Edward, Neb., held the record at $93,000. What did the John Deere 4055 with 22 hours sell for earlier this year? $275,000. Yes, you read that right.

Next to it in line that day was a 2002 John Deere 7510 with 13 actual hours. I saw this exact same tractor sell at auction in Kentucky almost 10 years ago to the day for $100,000. At the Berlin auction, the tractor went for $192,000.

The third green tractor that sold was a 1992 John Deere 4455 with 2,260 hours. It brought $160,000, which is $62,150 more than the prior record.

I expect strong prices on good used loader tractors for the rest of 2024.

A trio of John Deere tractors that sold in Wisconsin earlier this year shattered auction records.



The Power of Decision Points

Travis Jones,
Regenerative Ranching Adviser, Noble Research Institute

You can contact him at:

tdjones@noble.org

Have you ever had a situation where you looked back and thought, "If I had known that was going to happen, I would have done things differently?"

I think any of us who raise livestock could list times we wish we'd had a crystal ball. Maybe we were caught out of position or at the mercy of things outside our control, such as the weather or markets.

One strategy that can help producers retain control is what we at Noble Research Institute call decision points. A decision point is a pre-identified and documented condition with an action. Used well, it's a decision made in advance that will keep the momentum moving toward accomplishing your goals and objectives.

One example is deciding what to do if forage production falls below carrying-capacity estimates. Writing down each decision point helps you prepare your action in advance, but also cues you to track the information so you know when you're about to reach that decision point, be it rainfall or forage measurements.

PLAN FOR GOOD & BAD TIMES

The use of decision points in our farm or ranch operations can serve two important functions:

- **help mitigate risk while taking the emotion out of making decisions in tough situations**
- **put us in a position to recognize and take advantage of opportunities when they arise.**

> **A decision point is a pre-identified and documented condition with an action that keeps momentum moving toward goals.**

The process starts with self-reflection. First, what are my goals? Decision points can help with almost any ranching goal: financial, family, land management, livestock production, expansion, learning a new skill set or succession planning.

Next comes making a list of what you'd want to know if a crystal ball could show you what might affect your ranch in the future. Include opportunities that could help reach your goals if you were positioned to recognize and take advantage of them. List risks or events that could sneak up on you and potentially hurt your goals.

Then comes tracking information. Documenting data is crucial, such as how much rain you've received on your pastures by your decision date, which might trigger culling/destocking or moving cattle. Tracking market trends enables producers to identify a potential high market price in advance as a decision point for selling livestock.

BE PROACTIVE VS. REACTIVE

Setting and using decision points is a universal concept — that's why I like it so much. It can help us be proactive instead of reactive while being flexible.

But you can't be flexible if you are continually reacting to unplanned issues or events. Even a rough idea is better than no idea, so let's identify what we'll do if "X" happens and be ready to roll with the punches.

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Manage the Financial Risks of Conservation

PHOTO: USDA

How to build an investment-ready operation

BY JAMIE SEARS RAWLINGS

Any change on a farm or ranch carries some level of risk. When implementing conservation practices, the risk might be variable, but it's never zero.

The decision to add risk involves hours of planning, research and partnership. Even after that process, the final decision most often hinges upon profitability.

At the Trust In Beef Sustainable Ranchers Tour in August, Nick Jorgensen, Jorgensen Land & Cattle, and David Karnopp, Farm Credit Services of America, shared insights to create an operation ripe for conservation investments.

BE PATIENT & CREATIVE

Jorgensen and Karnopp agree conservation investments require an increased amount of patience and often creativity.

"As a lender, if an operation is wanting to invest in sustainability, we know that return on investment is not going to happen immediately," Karnopp says. "We might have to put together special loan packages, refer them to government programs or bring in third-party assistance."

At the farm or ranch gate, Jorgensen knows conservation investments also need vision.

"Whether you're talking about virtual fencing or genomic testing or an extremely rigorous embryo transfer program, all those things require taking on a certain amount of risk," Jorgensen says. "We try to take measured risks on smaller portions of our operation. In doing that, it creates trust we're not coming out there, putting the boat at risk, so to speak."

Whether you're talking about virtual fencing or genomic testing or an extremely rigorous embryo transfer program, all those things require that you're taking on a certain amount of risk. *—Nick Jorgensen*

PICK PARTNERS WISELY

Farmers and ranchers rely on trusted advisers in nearly every aspect of their operation.

"When you have a good partner, you talk all the time, you track trends together and you watch how

things are performing together," Karnopp says.

A sound lending partnership is critical for Jorgensen's operation.

"What we do in agriculture is capital intense, specifically with the amount of animals we carry on inventory," he says. "If we didn't have a good partner, this business would look immensely different."

PUT A BUDGET IN PLACE

While on-farm accounting procedures vary among operations, Karnopp says having a diligent system in place helps when seeking conservation funding.

"The best operations we work with have budgets in place," he says. "Working with a good accounting firm is a plus as well."

Jorgensen says he spends hours with his accounting system, making the operational analysis needed long before his conservation funding request ever gets to his lender.

"A good accounting system where I truly know costs and a good inventory and data tracking system means I'm not running analysis off of shoddy data," he says. "You must have your records right, otherwise your analysis is an exercise of futility because you're basing it off bad assumptions."

ENSURE TECH FITS INTO THE LONG GAME

Jorgensen warns against getting caught up in technology as a "shiny new thing."

Here are some questions he routinely asks himself when considering investments:

- **What kind of business impact will this have for our ranch?**
- **What kind of people impact will this have for our ranch?**
- **What financial impact will this have for our ranch?**

PLAN FOR THE FUTURE

According to Jorgensen, investment decisions are made with an eye on continuing the legacy the family has built on the land.

"When we set goals for new technology, we examine the conservation case and the business case," he says. "But, ultimately, we check if it supports the long-term vision for the family, which for us is maintaining family ownership."

Because the Jorgensens have a solid plan for the future of their operation, Karnopp says lending decisions are easier.

"With customers who don't have succession in place, if something happens, it puts the lending institution at risk," he explains. "It comes down to key communication and making sure the right plans are in place."

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Match Cow Size to Production Goals

Ethan Blom Ph.D., beef cattle nutritionist for Purina Animal Nutrition

You can contact him at:

eblom @landolakes.com

More pounds of production. That's the goal many producers, like you, seek so they can ultimately sell heavier calves. One way to reach this goal is to raise larger cows. However, there can be some impacts from increased cow size that could hurt your herd's performance.

We can infer the average cow size is increasing based on the yearly rise of fed cattle carcass weight nationally. Similarly, U.S. Meat Animal Research Center evaluations of EPDs across multiple breeds also show increased weaning and carcass weights for more than 40 years.

The perfect average cow size depends on the unique needs of your farm or ranch based on the environment and available feed resources. For example, a 1,500-lb. cow might work well in the Midwest, where there are lots of feed resources. However, that same cow might not be as profitable in the West where she has to travel farther for feed and water.

FEEDING FOR EFFICIENCY

Bigger cows have higher nutritional requirements. They need more energy, protein, vitamins and minerals as they get larger to maintain themselves and optimize performance. The good news is cows get slightly more efficient per pound as they get bigger. If you compare a 1,500-lb. cow to a 1,000-lb. cow, she would be 50% larger in weight, but her energy requirements would only be 36% greater than those of a 1,000-lb. cow.

The efficiency of larger cows does come with a drawback regarding their calves. Typically, there isn't a proportional increase in calf weaning weight as cow size rises. A 2009 North Dakota State University study shows the weaning weight ratio decreases as cows get heavier. In the study, a 1,000-lb. cow weans 48.5% of her body weight compared with only 43.6% of body weight weaned for a 1,400-lb. cow.

A major nutritional impact of larger cows is the effect on pasture stocking rates. The traditional stocking rate is based on an average cow size of 1,000 lb. If your stocking rate hasn't adjusted to current cow weights, your cows could be shorted on nutrition, which affects performance, such as weaning weights and pregnancy rate.

You could also run into issues where the pasture won't last for the whole grazing season, so you might need to purchase more forage or find other pastures.

PHOTO: WYATT BECHTEL

An efficient way to supplement cows on pastures is by offering free-choice, self-fed options such as tubs, blocks or liquid feed.

To further dial in feeding, you can hand-feed supplements such as cubes or a mixed ration. However, accurate measurement of how much your cows weigh is essential to hand-feed effectively.

DO YOU OWN SCALES?

You've probably made genetic changes to your cowherd, and average cow size has adjusted. Having a baseline of what your herd weighs will help make better management decisions, such as stocking rates and how much to feed.

It's hard to tell exactly what a cow weighs by looking at her, so it's important to get an accurate weight for your cows at least once per year and be consistent with it. Weaning is an ideal time to take this measurement since you'll likely be making culling decisions, and you can pinpoint larger cows that don't fit your operation.

If you have a set of scales at your working facilities, that is a good start. For those who don't own scales, it's a great time to reinvest in your facilities. Digital scales under a chute are an effective option to accurately and efficiently take individual weights. Another alternative is a portable scale you can move in front of the chute or alley.

If you haul your cows to a pasture, consider weighing your herd on the trailer at truck scales. This is an easy way to get an average for the whole herd without adding too much additional work.

One other option is to look at how much your cull cows weigh on the sale bill each year. This approach won't give you as accurate of a number as the other approaches, but it is a start.

There's not a one-size-fits-all answer to addressing cow size; it's dependent on your situation and what you can make work for your herd. Work with your nutritionist to start the conversation about the optimal cow size for your herd and to create a feeding and grazing program that fits your needs.

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When Hay Supplies Are Tight

Explore proactive strategies now to avoid costly decisions this winter

BY MAGGIE MALSON

When Mother Nature impacts hay quantity and quality, it's time to look for other options to maintain cattle through the winter months.

"Ranchers need to inventory their fall and winter feed supplies as soon as possible to develop economical feeding strategies," says John B. Hall, professor and beef Extension specialist at the University of Idaho.

He recommends taking hay samples for nutrient analysis, which will prevent overfeeding hay or underfeeding cows.

Consider these suggestions as alternatives to hay.

STRATEGIC DESTOCKING

Destocking can alleviate immediate pressure on hay supplies and provide an influx of money to reinvest in the farm, such as purchasing alternative feeds, paying down debt or investing in infrastructure improvements, says Jimmy Henning, a professor in the department of plant and soil sciences at the University of Kentucky.

"By selling off older or non-productive animals, farmers can reduce the demand on their hay supplies," Henning says. "It's a tough decision, but in a year like this, it can be a vital strategy for ensuring the herd's long-term sustainability."

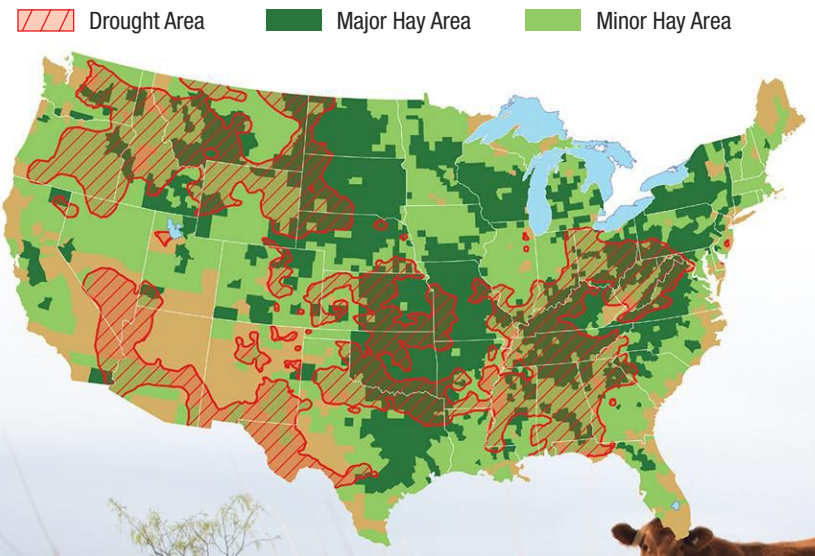
The decision to destock should also be coupled with a plan to restock or try alternative enterprises such as yearlings, he suggests. Hall says it's important to run budget analysis on the destocking option, including tax implications.

"With calf prices appearing strong the next two to three years, and replacing cows possibly costly, investigate all options," Hall says. "While reducing cow numbers might not be the best option, the value of bred cows is high, which might create an income opportunity over feeding alternatives."

STOCKPILING FORAGE OPTIONS

As producers look for ways to stretch their hay supplies, stockpiling forage, particularly tall fescue, is a key strategy in certain regions.

Hay Areas in Drought Sept. 10, 2024



MAP & PHOTO: USDA

Tall fescue, known for its resilience during cooler months can reduce the need for supplemental hay.

"Tall fescue is an incredible resource, especially in the fall and winter months," Henning says. "Stockpiling fescue allows producers to extend the grazing season and reduce their reliance on hay, which is particularly important when hay supplies are tight."

Beyond stockpiling, some farmers are exploring warm-season grasses, such as native species or Bermuda grass, which can thrive during hot, dry summers. These grasses offer a sustainable solution for diversifying forage options and improving pasture resilience.

"Perennial warm-season grasses aren't a quick fix, but they are a strategic investment for the future," Henning explains. "A diverse pasture system can make the difference between just getting by and actually thriving."

ALTERNATIVE FEEDS

When hay is in short supply, alternative feeds, such as soybean hulls, can be a viable option.

"While they might not be cheap, these feeds provide the necessary roughage and energy that ruminants need," Henning says.

Hall says corn gluten feed, distiller's grain, wheat midds or brewers grains can replace some hay and make hay go further.

"In general, 1 lb. of these feedstuffs can replace 1.5 lb. to 1.8 lb. of hay on an energy basis," he explains. "These alternative feeds provide additional protein, which allows for use of lower quality hay."

Another option is using ammoniated straw, which increases the nutrient value of straw as well as breaking down fiber content.

"Ammoniated straw can replace a significant portion of the hay for dry, gestating cows," Hall says.

ALTERNATIVE GRAZING

Crop residues, such as wheat stubble and corn stalks, are good options for fall and early winter feed for gestating cows. Grazing crop residues requires protein supplementation to meet nutritional needs of cows," Hall says. "Grazing hay aftermath instead of bailing a short field is another option."

"Take time to compare feed inventories to cow nutritional needs and develop a plan to meet those needs now," Hall says. "Be proactive to prevent costly decisions to buy feed late winter."

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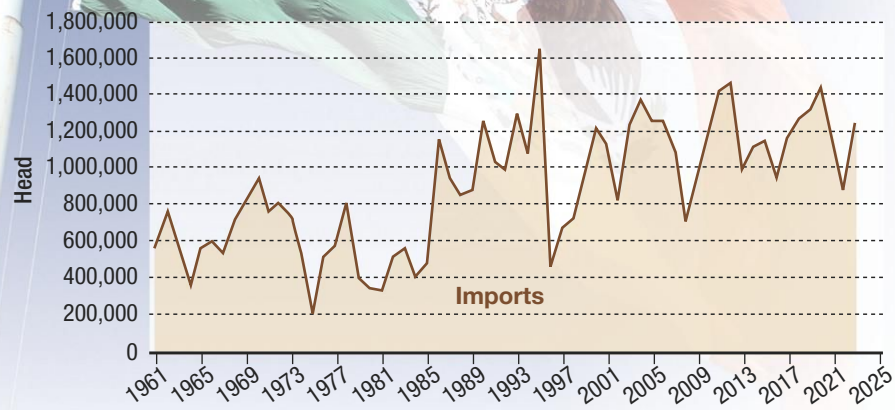
The Evolution of U.S.-Mexican

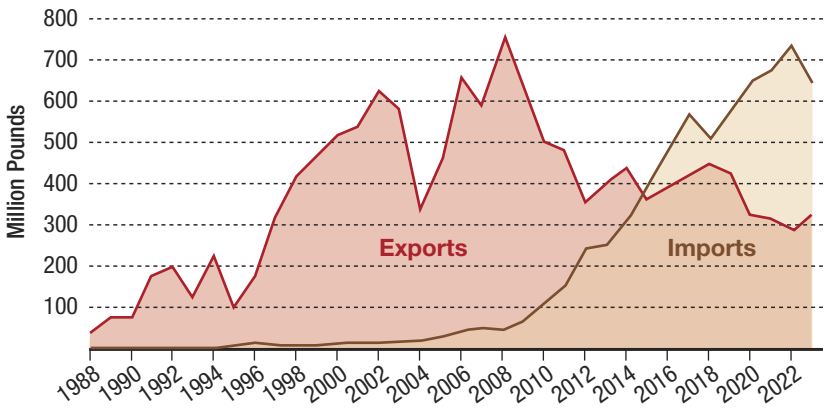
From one-way flow to bilateral business of diverse products

BY DERRELL PEEL

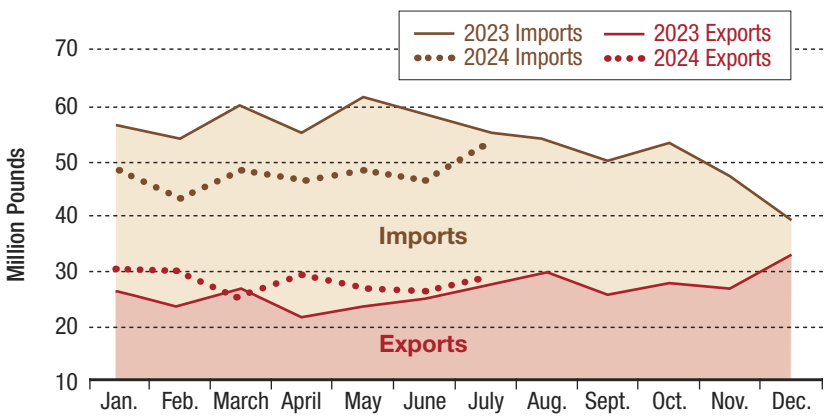
Annual U.S. Cattle Imports from Mexico



U.S. Beef Trade with Mexico, Annual Carcass Weight



U.S. Beef Trade with Mexico, Monthly Carcass Weight



The U.S. and Mexican cattle industries have a long and somewhat colorful trade history that continues to evolve today.

EXPORTS: U.S. TO MEXICO

In the 1990s, U.S. beef exports to Mexico started to pick up. Late in the decade, Mexico was the third-largest beef export market because there simply weren't many export markets (Japan accounted for 70% of total exports.) Mexico was roughly 6% of total U.S. beef exports at that time.

Accounting for an average of 23.3% of exports from 2000 to 2003, Mexico rose to become the No. 2 export destination.

After the BSE case in late 2003, Mexico was the only export market that did not stop or tank its trade. Mexico accounted for 72.4% of total beef exports in 2004.

Mexico was the No. 1 beef export market from 2004 to 2010 while other markets recovered.

The economics that drove the increase in beef exports to Mexico in the 1990s and 2000s was largely a matter of supplementing deficit beef as consumption outpaced domestic beef production.

From 2011 to 2020, Mexico was the No. 2 or 3 export market, averaging 15% of beef exports over the period. Recently Mexico dropped to the No. 4 market,

Cattle and Beef Trade

averaging 9.2% of total exports from 2021 to 2023.

IMPORTS: MEXICO TO U.S.

U.S. imports of Mexican cattle have been important through the 20th century and still are today. In the past 25 years, an average of 1.15 million head of cattle have been imported from Mexico each year. These imports represent a 3.3% average of the U.S. calf crop. Mexico has a comparative advantage in the production and export of feeder cattle.

U.S. imports of beef from Mexico accelerated after 2009, with the country jumping to the No. 4 place as a beef import source in 2010. Mexican beef imports continued to grow with the country moving into the No. 3 spot as a beef import source by 2017 and No. 2 in 2021.

The growth of beef exports from Mexico is largely the result of the Mexican beef industry switching from carcass-based beef markets to boxed beef technology in the 2000s. Adoption of boxed beef was a huge change in beef markets in Mexico that opened up more value as specific products could be targeted to specific markets, including export markets. Mexico has also seen significant growth in cattle feeding and packing infrastructure in the past two decades.

Mexico is now a major beef export market and beef import source for the U.S. meaning that trade has evolved from a one-way flow of beef to a bilateral trade of diverse products, which adds value in both markets.

In recent months, Mexico has been an anomaly among U.S. beef trade markets with exports increasing and imports decreasing. Numerous factors are contributing to current beef trade with Mexico, including Mexican macroeconomic conditions and domestic beef market conditions, along with a Mexican Peso that strengthened against the dollar from 2022 through 2023 before weakening recently.

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Beef Checkoff: Doing More With Less

Nevil Speer is an independent consultant based in Bowling Green, Ky. The views and opinions expressed herein do not reflect, nor are associated with in any manner, any client or business relationship. You can contact him at:

nevil.speer@turkeytrack.biz

Whether it's feeder steers, weigh-up cows or Choice strip loins, they're all predicated on per-pound transactions, except when it comes to collecting beef checkoff dollars. In that case, pounds are irrelevant — it's all based on head count.

That's a big deal. After all, shrinking inventory time means fewer transactions, which ultimately means fewer dollars for the checkoff program. For example, in 1990, total revenue available to the Cattlemen's Beef Board (CBB) was just north of $45 million, and it peaked 10 years later at $50 million. However, it's been downhill ever since. This past year's revenue was just under $43 million.

Now, consider the cumulative influence of inflation. In terms of real dollars, checkoff revenue has essentially been cut in half since 1990. In other words, CBB has fewer real dollars to work with. What is the impact of those dollars?

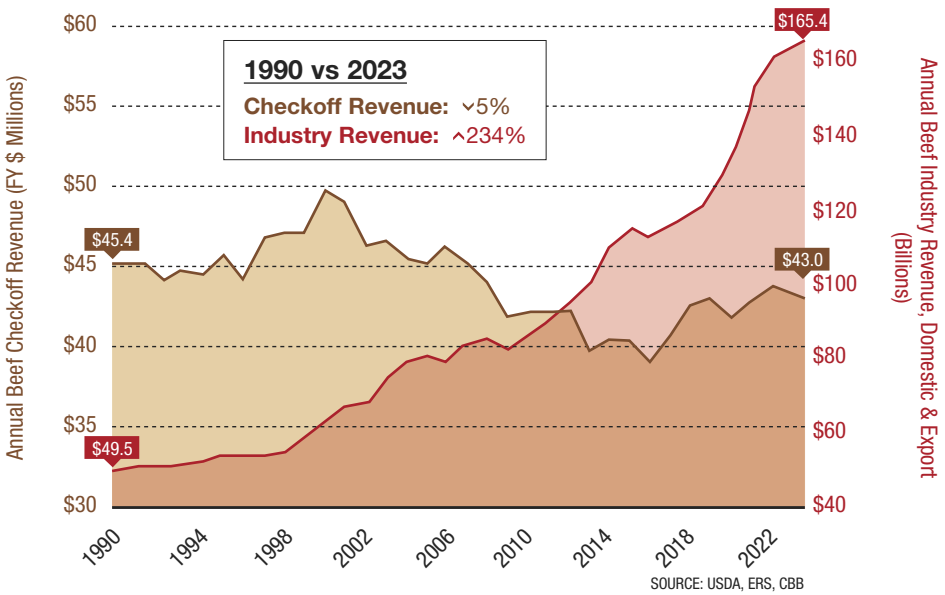
Therein lies the even bigger story. Beef industry dollars are generated one of two ways:

- Domestic spending
- Export sales

In combination, they represent the pool of money that flows back upstream to the producer.

In 1990, domestic spending totaled $47.6 billion, and export sales registered $1.9 billion (for a grand total of $49.5 billion). By 1998, when domestic beef demand bottomed, domestic and export dollars had grown to just $53.8 billion. In other words, the industry was ›

Annual Beef Checkoff and Total Industry Revenue



SOURCE: USDA, ERS, CBB

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[1]Syngenta Contract Research 2016-2019; Baker, A. and J. Drouillard. 2018. J. Anim. Sci. 96:393-394, https://doi.org/10.1093/jas/sky404.863

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experiencing revenue growth amounting to only about 1% per year during that time. Beef was getting pummeled by both inflation and the competition.

Fast forward to 2023. Domestic spending ($155.4 billion) and export sales (nearly $9.7 billion) combined for an industry total just north of $165 billion. That represents an annual growth rate of 4.8% since 1998, a dramatic turn of events.

It took some time, but the industry was finally able to get the ship turned in the right direction, and it should improve even further in 2024. Beef spending has started off in the right direction with domestic spending establishing a new record during the first half of the year.

Now, let's put this in context. Remember, checkoff dollars are in millions, industry dollars are in billions. Going back to 1990, the industry was generating $1,100 for every $1 of checkoff revenue available to CBB (the checkoff program representing just 0.09% of the industry at the time).

> **The industry generated $3,847 per checkoff dollar in 2023 versus $1,100 in 1990.** —*Nevil Speer*

In 2023, that ratio has grown 3.5 times. Sales have grown to $3,847 per checkoff dollar (the checkoff now represents just 0.026% of total industry revenue).

The beef industry's turnaround story is nothing short of remarkable. The checkoff program has been instrumental in helping to facilitate that occurrence. But even more impressive, when it comes to the business analysis, the beef checkoff has proven to be incredibly efficient and productive — year after year managing to help grow the business while operating on a fixed budget — doing more with less.

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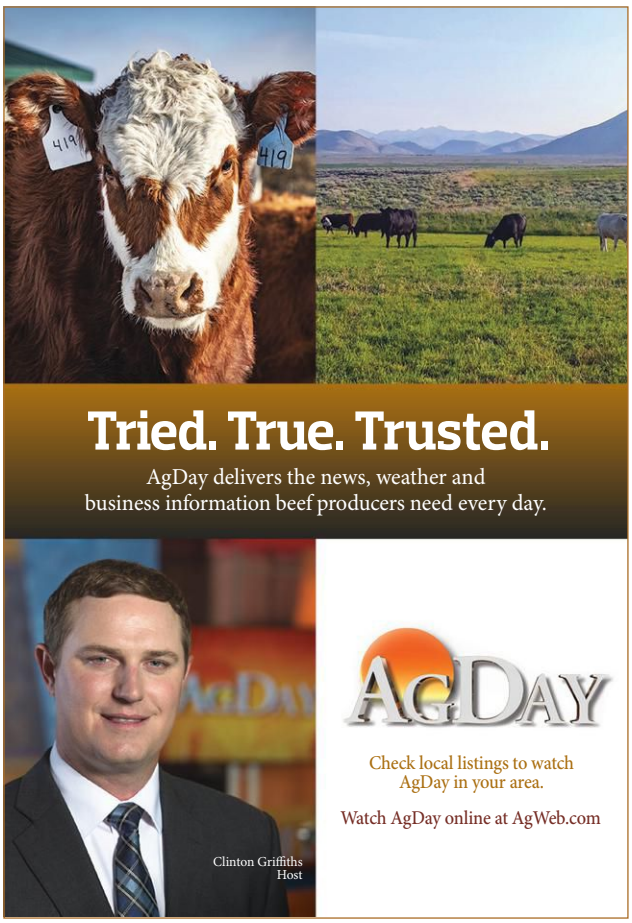
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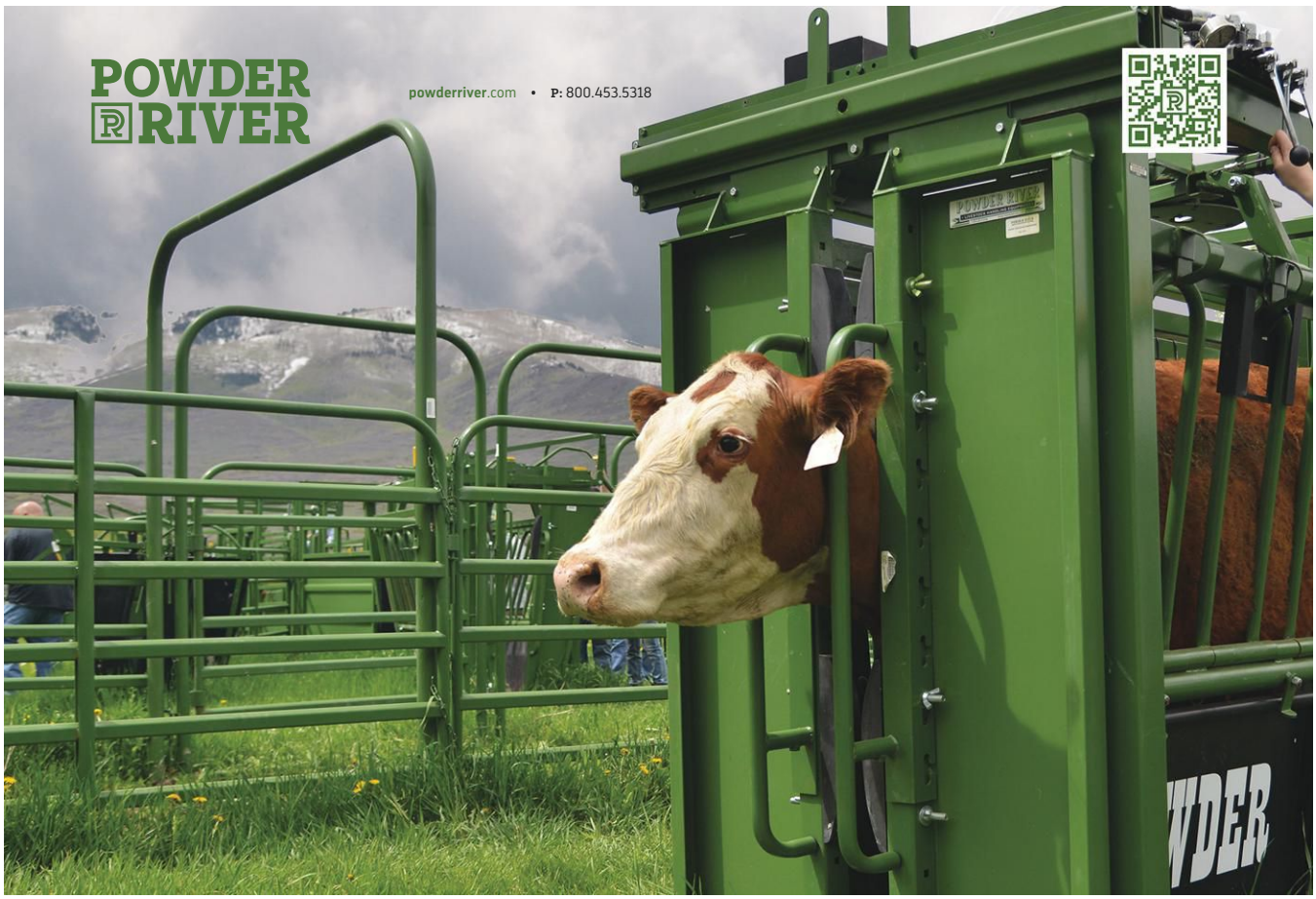

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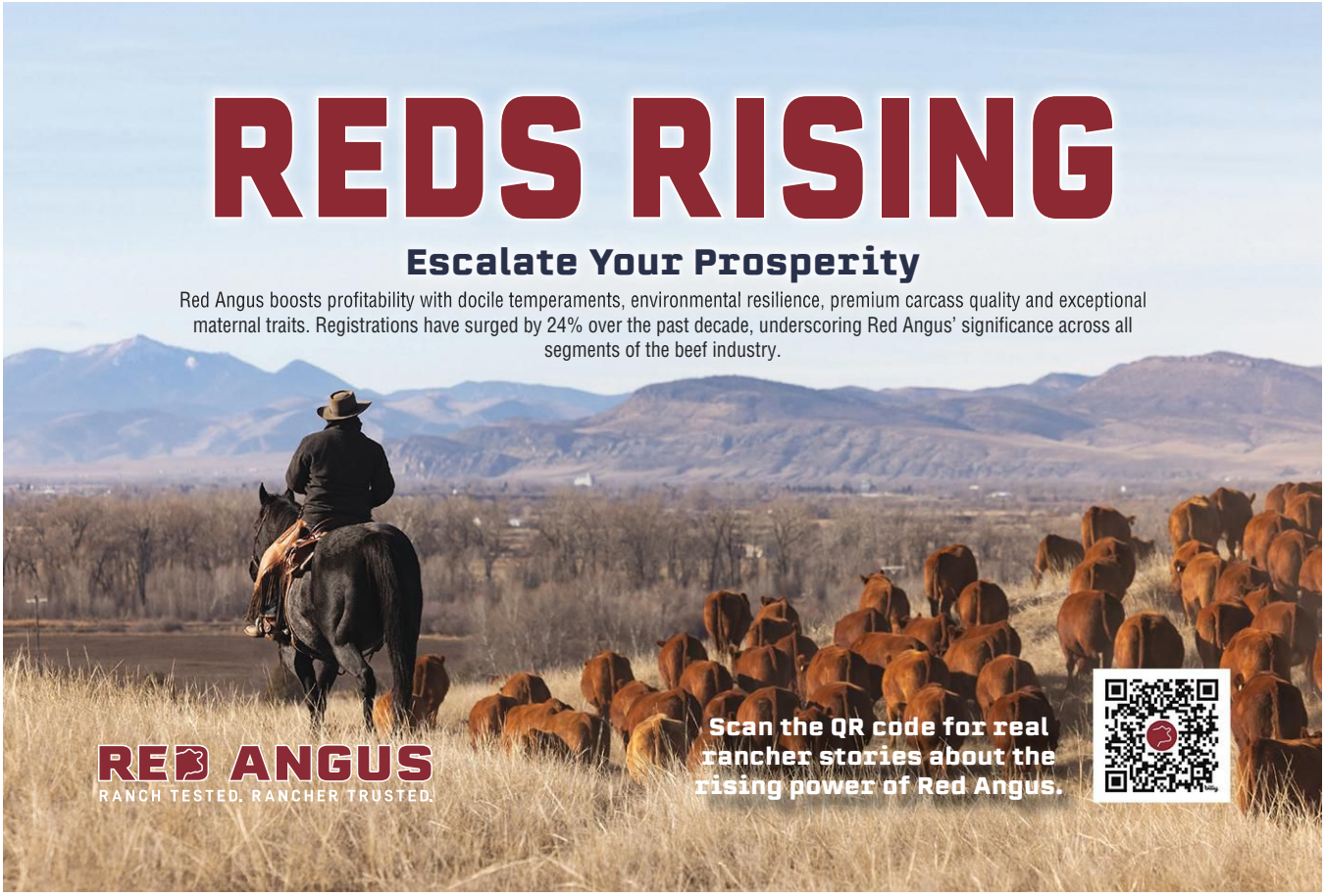

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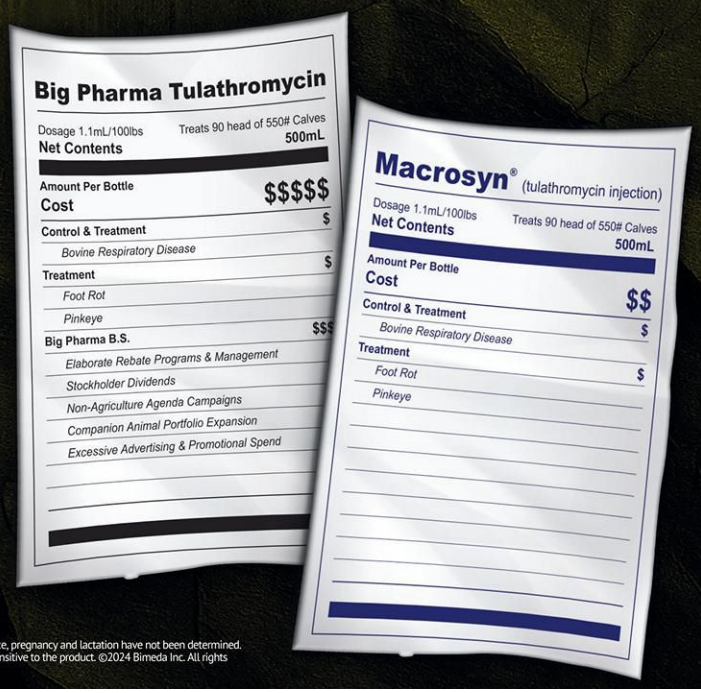

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a. Total No. Copies (Net press run)	113,541	107,742
b. Paid and/or Requested Circulation		
(1) Outside County Paid/Requested Mail Subscriptions Stated on Form 3541 (include advertiser's proof and exchange copies)	72,646	71,622
(2) In-County Paid/Requested Mail Subscriptions stated on Form 354 (include advertiser's proof and exchange copies)	None	None
(3) Sales Through Dealers and Carriers, Street Vendors, Counter Sales and Other Paid or Requested Distribution Outside USPS®	None	None
(4) Other Classes Mailed Through the USPS®	None	None
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d. Nonrequested Distribution (By Mail and Outside the Mail)		
(1) Outside County Nonrequested Copies Stated on PS Form 3541	38,749	33,342
2) In-County Nonrequested copies stated on PS Form 3541	None	None
(3) Nonrequested copies distributed through the USPS by other classes of mail	None	None
(4) Nonrequested distributed outside the mail	14	0
e. Total Nonrequested Distribution (sum of 15d (1), (2), (3), and (4)	38,763	33,342
f. Total Distribution (Sum of 15c and e)	111,409	104,964
g. Copies Not Distributed	2,132	2,778
h. Total (Sum of 15f and g)	113,541	107,742
i. Percent Paid and/or Requested Circulation (15c divided by 15f x 100)	65.21%	68.23%
16. Electronic Copy Circulation		
a. Requested and Paid Electronic Copies	7,260	7,157
b. Total Requested and Paid Print Copies + Requested/Paid Electronic Copies	79,906	78,779
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Dustin Johansen

It All Traces Back to Beef Demand

John Nalivka is the president of Sterling Marketing Inc., Vale, Ore., and provides the weekly Sterling Beef Profit Tracker on *Drovers.com*. You can contact him at:

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(541) 473-3266

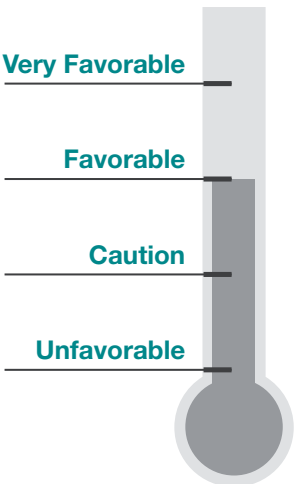
The market took a normal seasonal downturn into September following the Labor Day weekend pushing the question of demand and the opportunity for seasonal strength in the fourth quarter to the forefront. It's been said, the beef industry is getting to the point of "pushing the envelope" regarding retail demand. That remains to be seen.

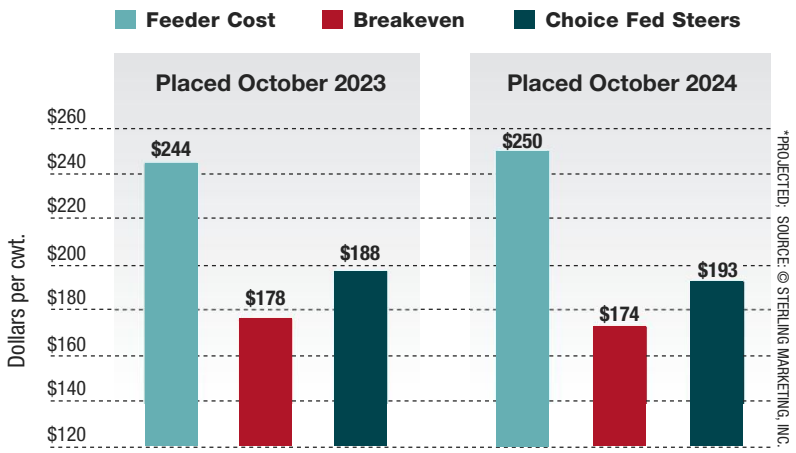
One issue that is beginning to dominate the conversation is that live weights are hovering near 1,600 lb. for some cattle and days on feed are pressing against the 200-day figure. It might not make sense until we consider quality grade and the cost for each additional pound relative to the market, even in the face of declining feeding efficiency as those cattle get heavier. At any rate, the grids are paying the bill – but for how long. Well, that goes back to beef demand.

A second issue is feedlot break-evens. In the latter half of August and September, feeding margins improved with lower feeder cattle prices. By then, feeder cattle prices were down 7% from July through early August, which reduced break-evens from the mid-$180s to the low $170s per cwt. Those September cattle expected to be finished in March present an opportunity to bring margins back over $200 per head.

Last, but not least, the Federal Reserve lowered interest rates by 50 basis points with further cuts expected. That's positive on the cost side as well.

Sterling Marketing Retained Ownership Opportunity Indicator





The opportunity to make money by placing cattle on feed looks a bit more favorable this year versus 2023.

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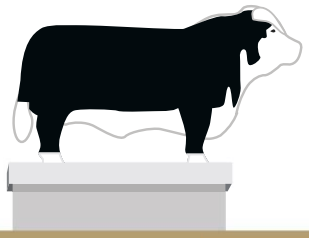

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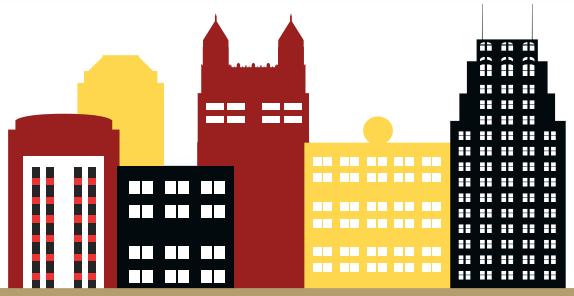

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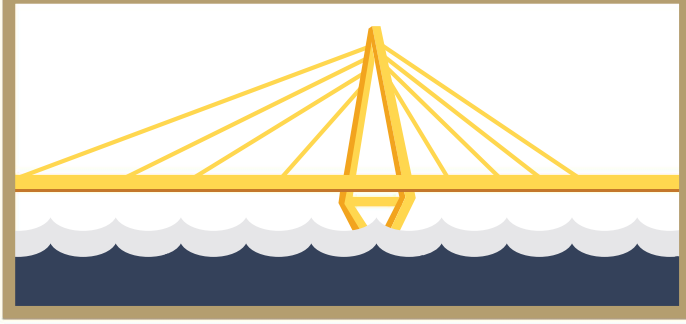

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Dan Halstrom, *USMEF president and CEO*

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